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FOREWORD
BY SIR STUART
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I would like to warmly congratulate David Grayson and David Harrison on their analysis of the Big Society and their subsequent proposals to develop a more widespread understanding, acceptance and, where appropriate, implementation of this agenda. Whilst the Big Society is a political initiative, many of the underpinning policies and ideas envisage a better partnership between individual citizens, communities, business and the state. Exercising power more closely to the point where it has an impact, greater transparency and accountability, and involving people in the design and delivery of the publicly funded services they depend upon are ideas for which there is increasing cross-party support. But at the time of writing, the Big Society agenda is not without problems, some of which are the administration's own making. As the authors (and many others) have noted, it is difficult to argue against local decision-making, but the gap between rhetoric and implementation is noticeable. Not least of the problems for the Big Society are cuts in public spending, undertaken at a breathless scale and speed that have left both local authorities and voluntary organisations in an untenable situation, unable to plan the sort of effective transition that might preserve community capacity in the medium term. Indeed, one wonders whether a 12 steps programme may be more appropriate for any rescue plan.

As the authors argue, any attempt to reboot the Big Society idea has to begin by accepting that the voluntary impulse is alive and well. A decline in civic participation does not imply a decline in civil engagement, and it is the voluntary and philanthropic actions of individuals and communities that we should build upon. Building a deeper, more sustained commitment from a wider section of the public will take time – a generation, perhaps – and investment. It will also require statutory bodies of all stripes and sizes to recognise that people get involved for a range of reasons: they are not simply a free labour force. It is also important to remember that voluntary action is socially and geographically uneven: the state will need to maintain a greater role in some places, whilst we need to ensure that those most able to participate, and perhaps exercise the strongest or loudest voice, do not then leave the rest behind.

The authors highlight the role of resources, and in particular the shift from a funding to a financing environment. Many of these new approaches, such as Social Impact Bonds or microfinance, are a solution to longstanding problems of resource inadequacy. Blending social and financial return may in turn blend the best that the statutory, private and voluntary sectors have to offer. But we need to be careful that in our haste to embrace the new we do not simply replace one resource monoculture with another, or in other cases hollow-out existing resource streams rather than supplement them. Social finance will not be for all; and, just as not all donors are investors, other funders will need to maintain forms of funding such as grants for which organisations do not literally have to generate a financial return. New technologies and emerging ideas such as crowdfunding may attract a new generation, but donors may have given anyway. Similarly, philanthropy and philanthropists have a role to play, but I am wary that we should perceive them as replacing the state. I remain keen to see a more nuanced map of resource needs against a map of support offered: for the Big Society to succeed I believe we will need a diverse funding ecosystem that reflects how organisational need changes with size, sub-sector and stage in the lifecycle.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The “Big Society” is one of the major unifying themes of Britain’s Coalition Government. Some say it is *the* unifying theme. Yet the authors of this Occasional Paper argue that the overall concept is not widely understood, even amongst inhabitants of the Westminster village, and that this has led various commentators, prematurely in the view of the authors, to write the Big Society’s obituary.

Views are divided on what Big Society means. One of the challenges is that the Big Society is a compound term; it bundles together a number of political and philosophical ideas: localism and devolution; more consumer choice and a greater variety of providers of public services; and greater responsibility on the part of individuals, businesses and civil society for improving the current state of civic affairs. All designed to lead, according to advocates, to a smaller state and, by implication, a bigger society.

The assumptions that underpin key elements of the Big Society do need to be re-examined; for example, in an age of hyper-active social networks, has civic engagement truly declined? Or, perhaps more plausibly, has the way in which we engage in civic activity simply been modernised, rendering more traditional platforms, like political parties, unions and churches, somewhat out-of-date?

In this personal contribution, the authors acknowledge that some of the rationale put forward in favour of the Big Society is unhelpful. However, they also argue that the ideas behind the Big Society have many valuable attributes and that, especially at a time of such eye-wateringly tight public finance settlements, the concept would benefit from clarifying and reinvigorating. The authors identify 10 steps that could be taken, by Government and by individuals, businesses and civil society, to achieve this. This paper will be followed-up by a second paper that will look in more detail at the implications for businesses of the Big Society and what their responsibilities may be.

One of the 10 steps suggested is for politicians to show a little more humility and a lot more historical perspective when talking about the Big Society; and being more generous in acknowledging the spade-work done by their immediate and more distant predecessors. Less talk about the Big Society in the abstract and more on how it will help address concrete and immediate challenges, such as eldercare, would also be helpful.

Given that devolution is central to the Big Society concept, Government should recognise that some of its proposals – even those purportedly made to enrich the Big Society – may be actively opposed by a reinvigorated and more empowered civil society. Conversely, with greater devolved power, comes greater responsibilities. Those newly in a position of power should act wisely when deploying it.

The Government could also recognize that the Big Society requires a deep and fundamental mind-set shift amongst public servants. Highly skilled though they may be, Government bureaucrats are not trained in organizational midwifery, especially when enterprises and entrepreneurs are the intended offspring.

Far more emphasis could also go on the need for culture-change. So far there is little evidence that ministers comprehend the intensity of the change-management needed, nor that they have the mechanisms in place, properly sensitized to the nature of the task ahead, to achieve this. This includes the need for a “big-hitter” within Government, able to ensure that the Government’s myriad actions combine to help more than hinder the realization of a “bigger society.”

The Government is trying to persuade business to support the Big Society. The business-led coalition, Business in the Community (BITC), recently noted that 77% of

business leaders said they could do more to scale up strategic support for communities across their business. BITC explored ways in which businesses can and do support small businesses and social enterprises to mutual benefit. The examples provided include business leaders mentoring social enterprises; supporting small business networks which enable small business owners to broaden their contact base and opportunities; providing loan funds and up-skilling these enterprises to be part of a modern-day supply chain.

However, businesses and politicians could be clearer with each other: if business is fed up with yet more “initiatives”, then it cannot be complicit in re-inventing wheels and it should say so. Business could be explicit that it wants the Big Society to be the big sustainable society and that the major business contribution will be focused on enterprise development, by which it will expedite the process of making businesses, private or social in nature, as sustainable as possible, as quickly as possible.

Civil society too could benefit from a new, more socially entrepreneurial mind-set to seize the opportunities which a Big Society could offer. This will require new skills and resources. This offers fresh opportunities for business schools, such as Cranfield School of Management, to engage with existing or newly-forming boards of civil society organizations, as well as social entrepreneurs with the aspiration and potential to grow; and with managers of new mutual organizations or participants in hybrid supply-chains that may emerge in response to Government reforms.

Finally, the Government could be clearer and more sincere about the implications of the scale and speed of public sector expenditure cuts for the capacity of civil society organizations to respond to Big Society opportunities. Palliatives like the £100m Transition Fund and the Big Society Bank are modest proposals with much to be modest about and, whilst welcome, do not fill the gap. If the Government moves toward this more strategic and more coherent approach to the Big Society, and one which recognizes the scale of the change-management programme that must accompany it, then, the authors argue, it is more likely and more appropriate that business becomes more involved too.

INTRODUCTION

Discussions about the responsibilities of business do not occur in a vacuum. They are part of wider debates about individual and collective responsibilities; about the roles of government, of civil society and of private enterprise; and about striking the right balance between, on the one hand, nation states and national law and, on the other hand, international institutions and “soft/hard” laws.¹

Among others, governments help build or undermine the “enabling environment” for corporate responsibility. In the UK today, the current Coalition Government is championing what it calls the Big Society. Unsurprisingly, the concept is politically contested; some opponents disagree with all of it; some opponents disagree with some of it; and some opponents simply accuse the Government of re-upholstering old ideas. This occasional paper looks beyond political philosophy and debate; and examines the Big Society as a change-management process. It asks, from a management perspective, what should be done if the Big Society is to be implemented well. Specifically, it considers what messages business should be giving government about the practical application of the Big Society concept; and, in turn, where “responsible businesses” then might most effectively make their own telling contribution.

¹ The term “soft law” refers to quasi-legal instruments which do not have any legally binding force, or whose binding force is somewhat “weaker” than the binding force of traditional law, often contrasted with soft law by being referred to as “hard law”. Soft law may include codes of conduct, “guidelines,” or “codes of practice.”

**THE BIG SOCIETY
– MAKING IT
BIG IN CONCEPT
AND BIG IN
PRACTICE**

The Big Society has become the focus of considerable political controversy with supporters and detractors debating its merits as a socio-political project. Putting this to one side, the concept does encourage more discussion about collaboration across the public, third and private sectors and opens up opportunities that could re-shape the way businesses work with their partners in national and local government, in public sector agencies, in NGOs and in Civil Society Organizations.

Everyone now understands that we must do more with less. There is pressure on all sides to create the infrastructure and services needed to ensure the smooth running of a civil society which gives its citizens the opportunity for a decent quality of life. The focus of the debate at present is who will be responsible for providing what, how it will be delivered and who should pay for it in a time of severe austerity.

It is generally accepted that business contributes to maintaining the quality of life in society. It does this in a number of ways: by providing goods and services for those who need (and can pay for) them; by employing people and buying from suppliers to produce those goods and services; by paying taxes on the profits it generates; and by refraining from certain actions that would have negative impacts on others (everything from polluting the air and the water supply, to engaging in fraud).

Many of us – and not just those of us who work in the field of corporate sustainability and responsibility – realise that, given the right conditions, the contribution that business can make to society can be so much more far-reaching than is currently the case, and in a way that benefits business itself.

The “corporate social opportunities” for companies to tackle societal issues, as well as to add value to their businesses, are extensive. We have reflected on these previously (Grayson and Hodges, 2004)², as have many others. In a recent *Harvard Business Review* (2011)³ Michael Porter and Mark Kramer re-articulated the notion that businesses, governments and NGOs can work together to create “shared value,” which they define as “policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates.”⁴ However, for those policies and operating practices to deliver positive impacts business, governments, public agencies and Civil Society Organizations need to work in an environment that supports their effective collaboration.

This paper is an attempt to describe how governments, business and Civil Society Organizations can translate the Big Society initiative into specific and practical mindsets and achievable actions that will enable the sort of cross-sector collaboration required for success. For the Big Society to be big in concept and big in practice, all of us must share responsibility for creating “shared value.”

² *Corporate Social Opportunity*, Grayson D. & Hodges A., Greenleaf 2004

³ Porter and Kramer, *op. cit.*, <http://hbr.org/2011/01/the-big-idea-creating-shared-value/sb1>

⁴ *ibid*

SECTION I: CLARIFYING WHAT IS THE ‘BIG SOCIETY’

UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS MEANT BY THE BIG SOCIETY

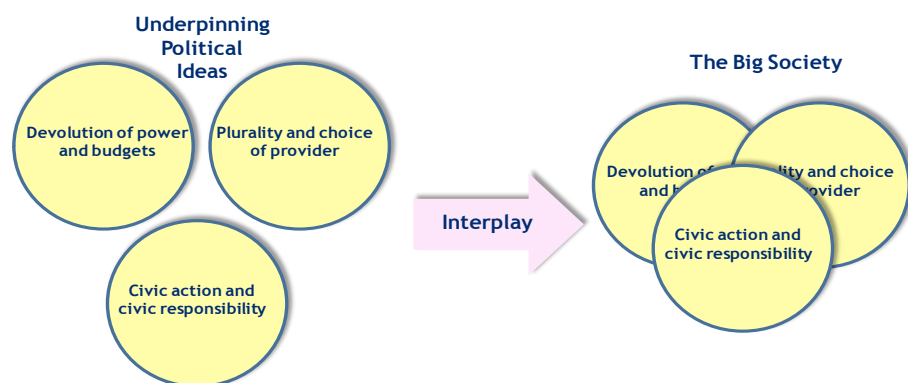
In a speech in Liverpool on 19 July 2010, David Cameron described the creation of a Big Society as his “passion”. He defined what a Big Society would look like: *“The Big Society is about a huge culture change where people in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, in their workplace don’t always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities.”*⁵

One of the great challenges facing David Cameron when explaining the Big Society comes purely from the density of the concept itself. When the Prime Minister talks about the Big Society, he uses it to refer to the inter-play of three political ideas⁶ – each quite distinct, each individually quite radical and each quite controversial. These ideas are:

- Devolving power and budgets from the centre to more local players, be they local authorities, local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) or individuals;
- Increasing choice in how consumers of public services spend their entitlements and encouraging a more diverse set of service providers from whom consumers can choose;
- Increasing the level of responsibility assumed at the local level and encouraging this to be converted into proactive, positive local civic action.

It is only when considering these three ideas together, and in dynamic interplay, that one starts to understand what the Prime Minister is driving at when he talks about the Big Society (see Figure 1). Some argue that these three ideas combined are based on aspirations for a permanently smaller state.⁷

FIGURE 1 – THE
COMPONENTS OF
THE BIG SOCIETY



Given its density, it is perhaps not surprising that getting the message across, in sound-bite chunks, is so devilishly difficult. Not only is it dense though, the compound nature of the Big Society concept invites criticism (and cynicism) both in toto and along any one of its three ideological flanks.

So, whilst on one level, devolving power can have an almost *a priori* appeal, placing responsibilities with others, whilst at the same time slashing the budget that the state previously enjoyed in discharging similar responsibilities, breeds resentment and

⁵ <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2010/07/big-society-speech-53572>

⁶ PM’s speech on Big Society 15 Feb 2011 (www.number10.gov.uk)

⁷ See, for example, “Taming Leviathan – a special report on the future of the state” *Economist* March 19th 2011

cynicism. It is little wonder that Town Halls have managed only two cheers as powers have been redistributed to them.

Increasing plurality and choice again, in the abstract, may seem like no bad thing to many citizens. However, it needs to be done with finesse not with a wrecking ball. So, dismantling a largely state-provided NHS, which currently enjoys the highest approval ratings with consumers for a generation, partly by bringing in private firms in the name of plurality and choice, is unlikely to win hearts and minds.

Saying that this policy opens up new and substantial opportunities for CSOs needs to be demonstrable to be true. Are there any examples we can point to at the moment? The Ministry of Justice has recently completed the tender for its Community Payback Framework Agreement ... which is a shame, because no CSO has been successful in getting onto that Framework Agreement. How about the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)? It has recently announced the outcome of its tender for Framework Partners for the Work Programme. Having spent months in the run-up wooing the third sector, the DWP has managed to give only two of the 40 contracts it has recently awarded to CSOs.

Then what about the civic action limb of the Big Society. This is in part David Cameron's antidote to his "Broken Britain" thesis. It is predicated on the view that civic activity has suffered a slow death over recent decades. But is this true - either in terms of the scale of economic activity that CSOs generate year after year, or in terms of the amount of non-monetisable civic activity that is going on, day-in, day-out? Many would say no.

Co-operatives, social enterprises, not-for-profits and voluntary groups already make a huge contribution to the UK (and the international) economy. In the UK there are at least 500,000 voluntary organisations. This includes 169,000 active general charities registered with the Charity Commission and 55,000 social enterprises, which include co-operatives, development trusts, community enterprises and housing associations.

With over 569,000 paid employees, charities employ 2% of the UK workforce and contribute £7.2 billion to its gross domestic product (GDP). Social enterprises in the UK now account for around 5% of all businesses with employees and alone generate more than £27 billion in income each year and contribute more than £8 billion to the UK's annual GDP.

In terms of non-monetisable activity, large sections of the population are active and generous in giving time and support. Involvement in charitable and community activity is vibrant and growing. For example⁸, the Home Office Citizenship Survey has questioned a sample of 10,000 people every two years since 2001, and in 2005 found that 50% of British adults (i.e. 20 million people) volunteer formally or informally at least once a month; this is an increase of 3% from the same survey in 2001.

The Citizen's Audit of Britain found that over a twelve-month period 62% had donated money to a political or campaigning organisation, 30% had helped raise money for a political or campaigning organisation, 42% had signed a petition, 25% had contacted a public official, and 13% had contacted a politician in an effort to change laws or policies.

The level of campaigning activity going on has increased over the last three decades. The World Values Survey found that the percentage of the British population that had

⁸ Much of this statistical information is taken from the Rowntree sponsored *Power to the People Report (2006)*, with some figures updated where information is available.

UNDERSTANDING CRITICISM OF BIG SOCIETY

taken part in a demonstration rose from 6% in 1974 to 13% in 2000 and those who had signed a petition rose from 23% to 81%. The organisations making use of such techniques have seen a comparable rise in membership: Friends of the Earth experienced a growth from 1,000 members in 1971 to 119,000 in 2002; Greenpeace rose from 30,000 in 1981 to 221,000 in 2002. Bodies which combine campaigning and advocacy work with leisure-time pursuits have done even better: the National Trust has seen greater than a tenfold increase in its membership between 1971 (278,000 members) to 2009/10 (3.7 million) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has enjoyed a growth from 98,000 to well over a million in the same period.

The newest and most innovative area of participation is enabled by the internet and social networking sites. Twitter-world and the blogosphere are awash with chatter with highly political themes and the Facebook generation is probably the most socially active we have ever seen.

In recent weeks, the Big Society has been variously dismissed as vague, naïve, or even a cynical ploy. Peter Osborne in the *Daily Telegraph* has argued that if the Big Society fails, so does David Cameron's premiership⁹. Polly Toynbee in *The Guardian* describes it as a "busted flush."¹⁰

The Economist, recognizing that Big Society is several distinct ideas, but with dynamic inter-play between them, declared that David Cameron "wants to craft a slimmer state, but also a nimbler and more responsive one....and localism, pluralism and transparency are excellent ways of furthering it. Pushing voluntarism on a sceptical population is not"¹¹ and urges the Prime Minister to ditch the name and the volunteering element.

Meanwhile, some charity leaders queue up to praise the concept but declare it badly (some say fatally) damaged by the speed and depth of public spending cuts. The retiring CEO of Community Service Volunteers, Dame Elizabeth Hoodless, previously a supporter of the Big Society, has argued that cuts are destroying the very fabric of the Big Society and criticized the lack of any strategic plan by which myriad government actions that affect the Big Society might be triangulated¹².

Undoubtedly, the attempt to promote the Big Society whilst making substantial cuts in public spending is fraught with difficulties. The Government comes across as petulant when failing to concede that the cuts will unavoidably erode civil society's trust in its own good faith and intentions. Consider the sentiment of Labour MP, Jon Cruddas, when he wrote recently, "I quite liked the idea of big society – a renewed emphasis on obligation, duty and social action in the local community"¹³ and argued that we must do our best to save the idea. The main question is how?

⁹ *Big Society RIP? Daily Telegraph* 4 February 2011

¹⁰ *Guardian* 7 February 2011

¹¹ *Economist* Feb 12th 2011

¹² Cuts 'destroying big society' concept, says CSV head, Feb 7 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12378974>

¹³ *Inside Housing* February 18th 2011

SECTION 2: GOVERNMENT AND THE BIG SOCIETY – A CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME: 10 STEPS

Unpalatable though it may be for some politicians and others, the Big Society is likely to be a part of the ideological landscape for the next few years. However, it is an idea that is currently in some difficulty. Urgent, substantial and ongoing remedial action is needed if it is to work. We suggest in the following sections what some of the steps to rehabilitation might be.

STEP 1 - RECOGNIZE THAT BIG SOCIETY IS A LONG BRITISH TRADITION

Whilst localism and the promotion of plurality and wider choice may not have strong antecedents, civic engagement and the pursuit of public benefit are deeply embedded within the British heritage. Much of what has been said and written about the Big Society could have come from the founders of the Settlement Movement more than 100 years ago or some of the great Victorian reformers, such as Joseph Rowntree or Thomas Barnardo. They were *doing* not just talking about the Big Society.

It is not just social reformers who can lay claim to the concepts that underpin the Big Society. The philosopher and economist Adam Smith, two and half centuries ago, spoke in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* about – “*How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortunes of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it, except the pleasure of seeing it... this sentiment... is by no means confined to the virtuous or the humane... The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it.*”

Even earlier generations of politicians were well aware of the dividend that social capital yields. Clement Attlee, in his Falkirk speech, mused that “*I get rather tired when I hear that you must only appeal to the incentives of profit. What got us through [the war] was unselfishness and an appeal to the higher instincts of mankind*”.

Today’s politicians could do themselves a favour by showing a little more humility and a lot more historical perspective when talking about the Big Society. If it is to prosper, there could be an acknowledgement that – in some of its aspects at least - it builds upon a long and apolitical tradition, which hopefully now can be updated for the 2010s and beyond.

STEP 2 - BE GENEROUS, ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR PREDECESSOR’S INSIGHT AND EFFORTS

Any party politician has difficulty in rising above the tribe. As a coalition, this Government should find it easier to do so than its recent predecessors. One way of doing this is to recognise the contribution made to some of the components of the Big Society by previous administrations. It costs David Cameron little to acknowledge, for example, the Prime Minister’s Council on Social Action established by Gordon Brown, and that the dedicated work of the business and community leaders who served on that Council, was the Big Society in action.

The *Right to Provide*, about to be unveiled as the Cabinet Office’s latest bright idea, was trailed in the 2006 Health White Paper and has indeed been implemented, under the *Right to Request* process, in the NHS for the last three years. In his time at the Department of Work & Pensions, James Purnell pioneered the *Right to Bid* initiative amongst welfare providers, well before Iain Duncan-Smith latched onto the idea. (Baron) David Freud, an adviser to Purnell, actually resigned as an adviser to the Labour administration in the year before the 2010 election so that, newly ennobled, he could continue his work with the Coalition Government.

Labour committed itself to a wide-ranging partnership with the third sector as early as 1997 and underpinned this with new and supportive procedural guidance to public bodies (e.g. *The Compact* published in 1998), the reform of charity law and new investment in building the scale and capacity of CSOs (for example, creating ChangeUp and Futurebuilders).

Some far-sighted changes were also made to employment law. These gave informal carers greater rights to insist on flexible approaches by employers. The Department of Health has estimated that the monetised value of unpaid, informal caring in the country is equivalent to a second NHS. Making sure that carers can care (and don't get the sack for doing so) will become increasingly important as demographics and fiscal constraints collide in the coming years.

For the Government to argue credibly that it will be different to its predecessors – because it really believes in decentralization – will require this Government to resist falling into the default mind-set of Whitehall, which is to centralize when the going gets tough. You cannot one day publish a Localism Bill and then on the next day threaten (as the Culture Secretary allegedly did) to use little known powers in a 1964 Act to take central control of library closures, because Middle England is up in arms! The country will reject the idea if it just means delegating the painful decisions, such as what to cut, whilst Whitehall holds on to anything that plays well in the media and at party conferences.

**STEP 3 -
RECOGNISE THAT
SHARING POWER
MEANS LIVING
WITH
CONSEQUENCES**

The Big Society is a sharing and devolving of power or it is nothing. This is not just from central government to the nations and to local authorities, but also from the state and all its myriad agencies to individuals and groups of individuals.

Inevitably, this will mean that government proposals, even those purportedly made to enrich the Big Society, may be actively opposed by a reinvigorated and more empowered civil society. The ill thought through proposals to sell off the Forestry Commission are a case in point and the current pause of the NHS reform proposals is rooted, according to the Prime Minister at least, in the Government "not taking enough people with us"¹⁴.

The Government might see this opposition as a popular rejection of the Big Society. It is not. Rather, it can be celebrated as the multi-polar power apparatus of the Big Society in action. We may witness similar bow-waves of opposition over proposals to hive off the canal network or those which threaten to commercialise the national blood bank. These are important acid-tests. The Big Society will have been accepted *de facto* when civic action and Government proposals can oppose without combusting. But first, we have to ensure that devolution does not stop at Town Halls.

**STEP 4 - WITH
GREATER
DEVOLVED
POWER, COMES
GREATER
RESPONSIBILITIES**

In the era of 24/7 news channels, on-line instant petitions and social media, there are dangers, however, in devolution. As cuts bite, there will inevitably be a lot more "swarming" on issues of the moment – reinforced by a media whose mission to educate and inform may sometimes be trumped by a drive to entertain and boost circulation or ratings.

The media should take more responsibility for the consequences of *how* it reports. Those of us who see ourselves as active citizens have to share responsibility for the consequences of *how* we campaign and agitate. Those newly in possession of power, need to act wisely when deploying that power.

¹⁴ David Cameron on the "Andrew Marr Show" - 1st May 2011

**STEP 5 - TALK
LESS ABOUT BIG
SOCIETY IN THE
ABSTRACT AND
MORE ABOUT
CONCRETE
CHALLENGES**

All of us could also usefully spend less time on the Big Society abstract and focus more on concrete issues: real-life examples of where the Big Society might produce better results for citizens. After all, the Big Society needs to be judged by its impact on the most vulnerable.

One powerful example of this – and of the previous point about us all being more conscious of consequences – is how we treat vulnerable older people in care and in hospital. If ever there was an issue crying out for big, generous and empathetic society this should be it! Ann Abrahams, the NHS Ombudsman, has rightly drawn attention to the scandal of maltreatment of older people in her recent report¹⁵.

All of us have a vested interest in this. Our parents and other elderly relatives today - us tomorrow! Sensitive treatment of older people, especially end of life care, is one of those “wicked issues” that defies neat, traditional, departmental boundaries and which can only become harder with an ageing population. The statistics are stark. The size of the general population of England is expected to grow by around 3.24 million to 55.3 million by 2017 – an increase of 6.3%. Not only will the population grow in total, it will also age considerably

In the next decade there will be a 30% rise in older people needing care. Long-term illness accounts for 80% of GP consultations, 80% of hospital days, 70% of admissions and 70% of health spending. The UK’s over 65s account for 95% of this spending. With age, physical and neurological degenerative diseases become increasingly prevalent - the Kings Fund has estimated that the cost to the public and private purse to deal with dementia will rise from £15bn in 2007 to £35bn in 2026 in real terms.

However, the prospects for funding growth are bleak. Since 2000, the NHS has enjoyed growth in annual real terms of 6.6%. There is a broad consensus that, beyond 2011, and most probably up to 2017, the outlook for public spending is inordinately tight. A real increase in funding of around 2% per annum for the NHS, which is very low by historic standards, would have implications for services. Such increases would just about cover rising demands for health care from population increases and changes in demographics. The real terms settlement in 2011 was a 0.4% increase!

The “*Whitehall knows best*” mind-set rushes for eye-catching initiatives and centrally-driven targets, which can be used to demonstrate to a shocked citizenry that the Government is doing something. Perhaps we shall see hospitals recruiting new “matrons” to show trainee nurses how to be more attentive and patient with older people. However, there is often little follow-through.

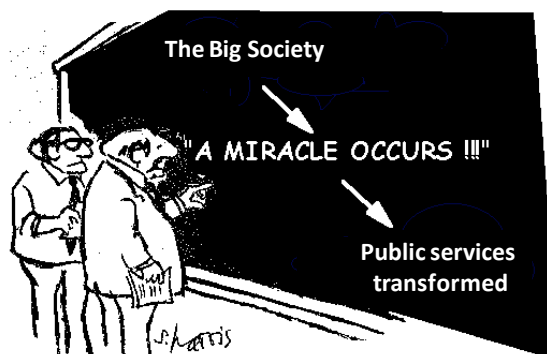
A Big Society mind-set should emphasise collaborative commitment to solving so-called “wicked issues”¹⁶, it should be more patient, more gradualist and more subtle and, as a result, it should be more sustainable. In this example, it recognises the complexity of the issues; it creates open-source learning networks where everyone with expertise and insights, from grieving relatives to health unions, to older people recently in hospital, to hospital administrators, to WRVS volunteers, to the Kings Fund, to Macmillan Nurses, to the Royal College of Nursing, to Age UK and Counsel & Care, can input ideas and solutions.

¹⁵ “*Care and Compassion*” – Report of the Health Service Ombudsman – February 2011

¹⁶ A “wicked issue” signifies an intractable problem, often one that straddles government departments, requiring joined-up action to tackle.

**STEP 6 -
EXPERIMENT WITH
INNOVATIVE BIG
SOCIETY
MECHANISMS AND
CREATE EFFECTIVE
MANAGEMENT OF
THE
GOVERNMENT'S
TOTAL IMPACTS ON
'BIG SOCIETY'**

The Big Society is suffering from a lack of practical tools, mechanisms and real-life examples, and as a result the Government occasionally looks as if it is flying in the dark.



**FIGURE 2 – FLOW-CHARTING THE
BIG SOCIETY**

**I think you should be
more explicit here in step two."**

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There are though good examples around but, as tends to be the case in the early years of an administration, they pre-date the invention of the Big Society tag-line. The Big Society could make use of more mechanisms, such as Participatory Budgeting and Citizen's Juries, where informed decisions can be reached, ultimately moderated of course, by elected politicians. The pioneering Community Links organisation has done important work on the critical role of relationships¹⁷ in public services. It has concluded that the key elements of what make a good relationship include understanding the client's particular circumstances, collaboration between professional and client, based on trust in the professional's competence, commitment from both to making the relationship work, a willingness on the part of the professional to empower and challenge (and be challenged by) the client, and sufficient time for these elements to be delivered.

In Tower Hamlets, the *You Decide!* exercise epitomises the commitment to community participation in local decision-making. You Decide! is a participatory budgeting exercise that goes further than many similar projects in its focus on mainstream finance and mainstream public services.

You Decide! allows the public to vote at a series of public meetings on how to spend council money on additional public services in their local areas. Over 800 local residents have taken part in deciding how to spend £2.4m on local services.

Other innovative community engagement initiatives that are being staged include:

- *Residents' Question Time* around community safety issues, including a young people's version called '*Question, Answer, Action*'
- '*Tagmap*' – a digital online mapping tool allowing young people to become citizen journalists and produce films about their local communities which are used to develop the Children and Young People Plan

¹⁷ *Deep Value: A literature review of the role of effective relationships in public services*, Bell, K & Smerdon M, Community Links (2011) <http://www.community-links.org/uploads/editor/Deep-Value-finalweb.pdf>

- *Older People Reference Group* – a service-user led group that co-designs services to meet the current and future needs of older communities.

In North East Lincolnshire, the Care Trust and the Council worked with Membership Engagement Services (a branch of the Electoral Reform Society). This resulted in the creation of Accord, a community membership body for North East Lincolnshire that gives its members (over 2,000) a major opportunity to make decisions on how NHS and social care money is spent.

Accord not only influences, it makes real commissioning decisions for services in the North East Lincolnshire area. The Care Trust has amended its governance arrangements to make this happen. 28 members of Accord are freely elected and sit on four commissioning group boards that oversee a population of 40,000 with budgets of £65m in each. Together with other public representatives, Accord members form a majority on each Board when compared to the six Care Trust members.

The Government itself could really benefit from effective mechanisms for getting hard-data from the front-line; processes for careful evaluation of this data (so as to avoid management by extreme anecdote); robust arrangements for getting accurate analysis through to ministers; and better ways of tapping the experience and expertise of the Big Society do-ers rather than just the Big Society talkers. It is perhaps ironic that the Home Office's Citizenship Survey, a longitudinal study of 10,000 adults in England and Wales which has been going since 2001, and which measures amongst other things, feelings about community, level of volunteering and civic participation, has itself been cancelled due to Government cuts!

Given that Government is such a critical player, creating the "*mood-music*" etc, there is no escaping the usefulness of a 'big-hitter' with broad management experience, political credibility and nous, and a mature understanding of the ways and means of Whitehall and the rest of the public sector bureaucracy. Someone who has the Coalition's authority to drive collaboration across Whitehall and Town Halls to ensure that the Government's myriad actions combine to help more than hinder the realization of a 'bigger society.'

STEP 7 - A NEW MIND- SET INSIDE GOVERNMENT

Just now, it feels as if most of the Big Society message has been from the governors to the governed: "*give more to charity, give more of your voluntary time, get involved.*" With our many combined years of working with and inside the machinery of government and the public sector, we would respectfully suggest: "Physician heal thyself!" The governors themselves need to be the immediate target of the Big Society message – and not with P45s (sent via email or otherwise!)

There was a telling moment in the Q&As with Prime Minister David Cameron when he was explaining his vision for the Big Society on St. Valentine's Day. You can find this in the transcript on the No 10 Downing Street website. An unnamed questioner tells the Prime Minister that he (the questioner) had recently spoken to an audience of senior civil servants and asked them how many of them knew what a social enterprise is. Apparently only about 10% claimed to do so.

Yet contracting out the delivery of public services to a wider variety of providers – mutuals, voluntary organisations and social enterprises - is one of the key ways in

which Government intends, in practice, to empower a bigger society: Government as “*steerer not rower*” in the words of Osborne and Gaebler¹⁸.

For those still inside the state being encouraged to test opportunities to become social entrepreneurs, this move has sometimes been set against an alternative of compulsory redundancy (e.g. all current Primary Care Trust staff following Andrew Lansley’s changes). The “opportunity” therefore, can be coloured by uncertainty and a feeling of rejection on behalf of those being encouraged to find a new future. Experience in the NHS shows that, just when public servants gain some self-confidence and enthusiasm, the bureaucracy can create complex “assurance” processes which can smother any entrepreneurial spirit that may have been emerging. There are dispiriting examples from the NHS *Right to Request* programme where leaders who have expressed interest in becoming social entrepreneurs, and who have convinced their colleagues to be part of this new future with them, have then been told (by the bureaucracy) that, individually, they’re not up to leading the new enterprise. Is there any wonder why hesitation turns into reluctance and finally, degrades into cynicism?

An effective, ongoing analysis of how government procurement and commissioning decisions are working out in practice would give valuable insight. The Cabinet Office Minister, Francis Maude, has made great play of the volume of opportunities open to CSOs, as Government opens up many more public sector activities for potential delivery by external providers. Yet, as we have seen with *Community Payback* and the *Work Programme*, there is a danger of hyperbole. This is especially true if – as one experienced charity CEO recently observed – “*the sheer size, complexity and risk of the Work Programme contracts, mitigate against CSOs from the start. This big size suits DWP, perhaps, but does it suit the needs of Big Society or localism?*”¹⁹

More realism about just how many net extra opportunities are created could be useful if ministers are also assuming that a good proportion of these new providers will be mutual, social enterprises and co-operatives spinning out of the state. Will the Government regularly publish data on the value of and number of public service delivery contracts run by CSOs and show whether these are started by former state employees?

Some have argued that the coalition has embarked on a re-shaping of the state which is Maoist in speed and scale of implementation. Whilst the analogy has extremely negative connotations, there does need to be a sober recognition that the Big Society needs to be underpinned by a cultural change in the civil service – and in the myriad organs of state that have grown used to “*Whitehall knows best.*” In the social housing sector for example, the massive reductions in public subsidies and the greater demands for housing create opportunities for the 2000 plus Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), with their capital assets and intricate involvement in many depressed local communities, to be exemplars of the Big Society in action. David Cameron has singled out RSLs as one group to help build the Big Society. However, as some leaders in the social housing sector have started to recognise, if RSLs are to become more like social enterprises – responsibly leveraging their asset base to fund new housing by attracting new investors to social housing (the Dutch Pensions Funds have been mentioned) – a fundamental mind-shift in staff and boards of the RSLs will be needed. The same can be said on the part of officials who have regulated the sector through repeated reincarnations, Dr Who-like, of their organisational form, so that they encourage a more entrepreneurial culture.

¹⁸ *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*, David Osborne and Ted Gaebler

¹⁹ *Private correspondence with authors.*

**STEP 8 – BE
CLEAR TO
BUSINESS ABOUT
HOW AND WHY IT
SHOULD EXPAND
AND INNOVATE
WITH ITS
INVOLVEMENT IN
THE BIG SOCIETY**

The Big Society may also be a timely opportunity to advance ideas for collective self-regulation and co-regulation, where leading businesses work with Government and civil society more broadly to define and implement “responsibility deals”, or what the previous Prime Minister’s Council on Social Action called “collaborative commitments”²⁰ defined as *“agreements made voluntarily between individuals and organisations from business, public sector and civil society, to achieve positive social impacts which would not be possible for one sector acting alone, to obtain”*.

Extending the reach of social enterprise is a key element of the Big Society and this may have a natural fit with the expertise and interests of business. In particular, successful business entrepreneurs can help those social entrepreneurs and enterprises with the aspiration and potential to grow, to do so successfully.

This can include mentoring social entrepreneurs, serving as non-executive directors on the boards of social enterprises, contributing to innovative forms of expansion, financing and capacity-building. Cranfield School of Management, for example, offers bursaries to social entrepreneurs, who have the aspiration and potential to grow, to participate in the School’s long-running and successful Business Growth Programme, which was previously run for traditional for-profit entrepreneurs. There are also good examples of social enterprise incubation going on - for example the Co-operative Group provides an ongoing development resource for mutuals run via its Co-operative Enterprise Hub²¹.

Critical to engaging businesses effectively will be a genuine willingness on the part of politicians to share responsibility. Previous governments of all political persuasions have repeatedly exhorted businesses to get involved, but many would argue these governments had already pre-determined what they wanted. This time around, business could be more engaged by being given a real say, with clarity about funding commitments and a common will to learn from and build on previous experience.

**STEP 9 - NEW
SOURCES OF
SOCIAL
INVESTMENT ARE
NEEDED**

As we stated at the outset, it is naïve to imagine that support for the Big Society can easily be won when Government spending cuts are substantially reducing the capacity of CSOs. Other cross-government initiatives, such as Payment by Results for public services, whilst worthy when looked at in isolation, will drain working capital from suppliers, including CSOs. But the CSO sector is already chronically under-capitalised. This level of under-capitalisation is not easy to compute. We do know though, that CSOs currently spend well over 90p in every £1 earned just paying day-to-day bills, so little internally generated funds are being reinvested in strengthening CSO balance sheets. The cuts are likely to reduce this buffer, not enlarge it. We also know that, since 2002, around £450m has been provided from public sources to create a range of investment funds for CSOs, the vast majority of which has, by 2011, now been distributed.

In its recent report the National Council of Voluntary Organisations²² called for a doubling of the CSO sector’s free reserves, from £16bn in 2007/08 to £32bn in 2020. It would like to see this happen through a combination of higher retention of internally generated funds, by the systematic recapitalisation of balance sheets

²⁰ *Responsibility deals were proposed by a Tory working party whilst in opposition and were included in the Conservative election manifesto: “We will introduce a Responsibility Deal on waste — a voluntary arrangement among producers to cut back on the production of waste and improve its disposal — as we move towards our goal of a zero-waste society”* (p. 97). The environment secretary Caroline Spellman is proposing to move ahead with this pilot responsibility deal.

²¹ See www.co-operative.coop/enterprisehub

²² *Funding the Future – A 10 Year Framework for Civil Society (NCVO Funding Commission – December 2010)*

through external investment and by the development of additional structured capital platforms, such as social investment bonds, social impact bonds, a social stock exchange and the like. Removing barriers to social investment by charities, such as those currently being examined by the Charity Commission, may also help²³.

The government has not been inactive. For example, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has asked for thoughts on a Big Society Fund, which may provide seedcorn funding to allow local community groups to play a part in the innovative delivery of public services. Measures like the Cabinet Office's £100m Transition Fund and proposals for the Big Society Bank are welcome but in the context of a multi-billion funding gap, these are modest proposals that will struggle just to fill the gap created by the cuts, let alone act as a springboard for a newly-enlarged CSO sector. Even the much-lauded Project Merlin looks rather less exciting when you read the fine print to discover that the major UK banks will make their £200 million of funds available to the Big Society Bank, but only on fully commercial terms²⁴! Without new mechanisms that liberate CSOs, and which are proportionate to the scale of the task ahead, there is the danger – in the words of one thoughtful participant – of a “civil society desert, especially in the poorest areas of the UK, where a Big Society is needed most.”²⁵

**STEP 10 - NEW
ENTREPRENEURIAL
MIND-SET NEEDED
IN CSOs – AND
MARKET
OPPORTUNITIES
TO SUPPORT THIS**

The Big Society is an opportunity for CSOs but it is not a ready-made opportunity. Charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises may themselves have to consider some changes in how they engage with government and business. In many cases this could involve restructurings, including mergers and acquisitions. This is already starting to happen: the well-respected Fairbridge Society voluntarily choosing to become part of The Prince's Trust; Prostate Cancer Research Foundation and Prostate UK merging to create Prostate Action; Help the Aged and Age Concern combining forces to become Age UK. A number of these mergers, of course, pre-date and have happened independently of the Big Society but the constrained financial situation may accelerate this trend. Grasping this opportunity may also require a willingness on the part of leaders and governors of CSOs to become more entrepreneurial. There has been an explosion in recent years in the number of social enterprises. Some of these have already become significant players – the Eden Project in Cornwall; the Big Issue Foundation. We must have more social entrepreneurs with the aspiration and potential to grow, but also to cooperate with each other and with the private sector where their particular skills are needed. Continuing evolution of civil society can be supported through research, teaching and through pro bono and subsidized help by leading management schools such as Cranfield School of Management. In Cranfield's case, this builds on individual faculty involvement on boards of charities and voluntary organisations, pro bono management help to charities through the independent Cranfield Trust charity, and places on leadership and management development programmes, including bursaries to attend relevant courses, including the MBA and executive programmes, and the School's non-executive director programme.

²³ Charity Commission – *Charities & Investment Matters (A Consultation – December 2010)*

²⁴ 3rd Evidence Session of the Public Accounts Committee's Enquiry into Philanthropy and Funding of the Voluntary Sector – 3rd May 2011

²⁵ Private communication to authors from a charity CEO

SECTION 3: BUSINESS AND THE BIG SOCIETY

Should business have anything to do with the Big Society? Recent history is littered with the initiatives of political leaders inviting business to contribute to the public good, all of which were launched with great fanfare but which then faded away. Business leaders have good reason to be sceptical when politicians propose partnerships but they should not substitute cynicism for scepticism.

In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher proposed a smaller state but business leaders at that time, such as Alastair Pilkington, Hector Laing and Allen Sheppard, understood the clear *quid pro quo*: if business wanted a smaller state, it had to step up to the mark and be more active in society. It led to some halcyon days in public-private-community partnerships, for example the Groundwork Trusts, local enterprise agencies, Education-Business Partnerships, Community Development Trusts and people development organizations like Fullempley, Tomorrow's People, and Common Purpose.

Business and other parts of society should be clear with politicians: you may feel compelled to peddle the illusion of progress which new initiatives create, but the rest of us are not interested in political gimmickry, and will not be complicit in re-inventing wheels. This is one line in the sand for taking part. Business could be explicit that it wants the Big Society to be the big sustainable society; and that the major business contribution will be focused on enterprise development, as firms such as AXA, Barclays, BlackBerry, Experian, Google, Intel, Microsoft, McKinsey & Co, O2 and Virgin Media are doing with their backing for StartUp Britain, a new initiative aimed at encouraging people to set up their own businesses. Established businesses might further support processes of making businesses, private or social in nature, as sustainable as possible.

There are a number of other ways in which business could provide some much-needed horsepower to the Big Society and it's fair to say that some of this is already happening. These are:

- **Mentoring and coaching** – the Government has made quite a lot recently about identifying mentors for social enterprises and mutuals. The Mutuals Taskforce²⁶ was launched in February 2011 but the cast-list assembled by the Government shows the paucity of business influence in this area; plenty of space for the advocates, the interest groups, the management consultants and, dare we say, the academics, but too little room for the corporates and the larger mutuals (the John Lewis Partnership being the somewhat lonely exception).
- **Pro bono activity** – in its recent report *Transforming Business, Transforming Communities - Business consultation on Government's 'Big Society' vision*, Business in the Community noted that 77% of business leaders said they could do more to scale up strategic support for communities across their business, while 80% felt they could do more to engage other businesses to scale up their support. The Enterprise Enquiry, which informed the report, and which was led by Goldman Sachs, explored ways in which businesses could and do support small businesses and social enterprises to mutual benefit. The examples provided include business leaders mentoring social enterprises; supporting small business networks which enable small business owners to broaden their contact base and opportunities; providing loan funds and up-skilling these enterprises to be part of a modern-day supply chain. Well-structured *pro bono* activity, which leverages the core skills of businesses, rather than simply offering time can prove invaluable. There may be scope, for example, for investment banks to start

²⁶ www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/mutual-futures-public-services-swindon

to move away from being the pantomime villain by supporting mergers and acquisitions in CSOs – by business sharing (and substantially refining) its expertise in M&As to help CSOs develop scale - and then business using its muscle to negotiate bridging support from Government for the leaner, merged CSOs which emerge.

- **Supply chain partnering** - between corporates and CSOs, each recognising the particular contribution of the other. These might build on early examples like Serco/Catch 22/Turning Point co-venture to run Belmarsh Prison and even some of the Work Programme supply chain partnerships that are in the process of developing..

- **Sharing corporate support service platforms** – giving small social entrepreneurs and enterprises, access, at least for a period, to the support service platforms of larger businesses (including shared office space), at the marginal costs to that larger business, would help such enterprises to find their feet.

- **Investment and restructurings** – providing more sources of finance and in more innovative ways (first-loss equity, royalty-based investment, insurance wraps) for CSOs. However, this investment needs to recognise that fully commercial returns are, by and large, not on offer – rather a cocktail of financial and social return will be earned. The National Council of Voluntary Organisations²⁷ has recently called for a range of capital market platforms to be created to support the financial development of CSOs (including Social Gilts, Social Investment Bonds, Social Impact Bonds, Civil Society ISAs, Community Share Issues, a Social Stock Exchange etc.).

In general, business could sensibly concentrate its contribution to the Big Society where business has expertise and where it is in the long-term interests of business. One distinctive contribution is expertise in service re-design since, effectively, we are talking about a *re-imagined state*.

Business can also help broaden the ownership of the Big Society concept so that it acquires some much-needed apolitical credentials. There are a range of organizations that can legitimately claim to have been promoting Big Society ideas and practices for some time now - such as Community Links, the Young Foundation and the RSA. These bodies need to be brought into the Big Society tent and they might just do this once they feel that their diligent contribution over the years has been recognised and is being respected – not that it is being crow-barred out of shape to support an overtly party political narrative.

Today, unlike the 1980s age of austerity, connectivity and social media create many more opportunities for the Big Society and active citizenship to go to scale much faster if, crucially, it is complemented by serious investment in people development.

Training more people to be *connectors* (networkers who naturally put people together all the time); *mavens* (collectors and assemblers of information, who can make sense of what others see as random data) and *salespeople* could help make the Big Society something much more than just a gimmicky marketing slogan. Business in the Community has plans to establish a network of 1,000 “business connectors” - brokers across the country, to promote better corporate community engagement. It could be one of the ways that businesses develop their own employees’ skills for volunteering — thereby gaining business benefits, whilst contributing to the development of the Big Society. Here again, the message should be: “*don’t re-invent the wheel*” – the Partnering Initiative of the International Business Leaders’ Forum has been training managers from all three sectors, in cross-sectoral partnership skills, for almost two decades.

²⁷ *Funding the Future – A 10 Year Framework for Civil Society (NCVO Funding Commission – December 2010)*

However, it is not clear where the funding is going to come from for these community organizers. This is another 'line in the sand': business and government need to be very clear about what tabs, if any, they are each prepared to pick up, to avoid unrealistic expectations at the outset.

The Doughty Centre will be publishing a further paper later in the year on the ways that business can contribute to the community and social cohesion, as one aspect of being a responsible business.

**CONCLUSION:
SHARED
RESPONSIBILITY
FOR BIG SOCIETY**

Let us resist rushing to the barricades either to defend or to condemn the Big Society. The Big Society has already succeeded in encouraging intensified debate on what a modern state should do, what we should be prepared to do collectively without the involvement of Government, and what falls to us as individuals. We are yet to reach firm conclusions but the debate is surely needed, especially given the seismic shift expected in the coming years.

The conclusions we suggest to Government is the need for them to recognise history, to learn from previous efforts to promote "people-power", to concede that people power means that what is and what is not "Big Society" is in the eye of the beholder, not of Government; to find better ways of studying and solving "wicked issues" and to recognise that Government itself needs to buy its Big Society message, not just sell it to others.

Just maybe, we might then get on the road to a bigger society and a more competent, realistically structured state fit for the challenges of global competition, sustainable development and the ticking demographic time-bomb.

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They both write here in a personal capacity. Doughty Centre for Corporate Responsibility Occasional Papers are personal contributions to debate, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Centre or the wider Cranfield School of Management, or reviewers listed below.

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